

Parity: A Principle with Bipartisan Support

Despite being four months into the fiscal year, Republicans still have not worked with Democrats to reach an agreement to raise the spending caps and fund the government for the remainder of the fiscal year. This week, Republicans will put forward yet another Continuing Resolution that kicks the can down the road for a fourth time this fiscal year. Republicans ought to work with Democrats on a bipartisan, long-term budget that fully funds both our nation's domestic and security priorities and adheres to the principle of parity, which has been a hallmark of every bipartisan budget agreement going back to the 2011 Budget Control Act, and ensures both domestic and military funding are consistently protected from arbitrary sequester cuts.

What is parity?

- Parity ensures that both defense and non-defense programs – which are essential programs such as education, infrastructure, and research – are funded or subject to sequestration at the same rate.
- Parity means that if sequestration cuts are lifted, those caps should be raised evenly, on a dollar-for-dollar basis, on both the defense and non-defense sides of the ledger.

How did we get here?

- In 2011, Congress passed the Budget Control Act which imposed annual caps on defense and non-defense discretionary spending, through 2021, to reduce spending by roughly \$1 trillion. The bill also created a 'supercommittee' to develop plans to reduce the deficit by an additional \$1.2 trillion.
- When the supercommittee was unable to find an additional \$1.2 trillion in deficit reduction measures, the Budget Control Act triggered a reduction in the new discretionary caps of \$109 billion annually, enforced through across-the-board cuts known as sequestration. These cuts were equally divided between defense and non-defense programs.

What are non-defense discretionary programs and why are they important?

Non-defense discretionary programs include a number of priorities that help American families get ahead. By ignoring the principle of parity, Republicans leave America's working families behind. These programs include:

- Law enforcement, including antiterrorism and border security
- Transportation and infrastructure programs
- Education, early childhood development, and skills training
- Science research, environmental protection programs, and clean energy development
- Economic development projects, such as community development block grants
- Health care and medical research, including veterans' health care programs
- International diplomacy, including the U.S. Department of State, USAID and foreign aid

When have Republicans worked with Democrats to achieve parity between defense and non-defense programs before?

2013: Speaker Ryan and Chairwoman Patty Murray author the Bipartisan Budget Act, raising the defense and nondefense discretionary spending caps by \$64 billion over two years.

Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI): "The Bipartisan Budget Act will provide \$63 billion in sequester relief — split evenly between defense programs and other domestic priorities — in exchange for \$85 billion in savings elsewhere in the budget.... It's not perfect. But it's a start. And I ask all my colleagues in the House to support it." [Op-Ed, [12/11/13](#)]

2015: Speaker Boehner passes a second Bipartisan Budget Act that raises spending caps for two additional years for defense and non-defense spending by \$80 billion over two years.

Speaker John Boehner (R-OH): “This agreement will adjust the spending caps for two years by \$80 billion, \$50 billion the first year, and \$30 billion in the second equally divided between defense and non-defense spending... This deal isn't perfect by any means — but everyone should acknowledge what our alternative was... If we didn't reach a bipartisan budget agreement, we would have been forced to accept another 'clean' debt ceiling increase. Instead, we negotiated a plan that will also support our troops and deliver real entitlement reforms. In my view, this is the best possible deal at this moment for our troops, for taxpayers, and for the American people. ”
[Remarks to GOP Caucus, [10/27/15](#)]

Defense officials have also spoken out about the importance of maintaining equal funding levels for both defense and non-defense spending levels.

In a letter to Congress, 120 Retired three and four star flag and general officers write on the importance of funding non-defense and defense priorities: “We know from our service in uniform that many of the crises our nation faces do not have military solutions alone – from confronting violent extremist groups like ISIS in the Middle East and North Africa to preventing pandemics like Ebola and stabilizing weak and fragile states that can lead to greater instability... The military will lead the fight against terrorism on the battlefield, but it needs strong civilian partners in the battle against the drivers of extremism— lack of opportunity, insecurity, injustice, and hopelessness.” [Letter to Congress, [2/27/17](#)]

440 Retired Generals and Admirals write to Congress on the need to fund education and early childhood education programs as a matter of national security: “While Congress faces tough spending choices ahead to secure and protect our Nation, we know that the backbone of our military is, and will always be, our women and men in uniform. As a matter of national security, in order to grow the pool of eligible recruits, Congress must prioritize investments in early childhood programs, including funding for Head Start, the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), and Preschool Development Grants.” [Letter to Congress, [5/30/17](#)]